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THE PHILOLOGICAL BENEFIT OF ELEMENTARY SANSKRIT[†]

This is an era of discussion concerning simple and simplified spelling and phonetic alphabets. Surely then it is à propos to speak a word in behalf of Sanskrit. The spelling in this language followed the pronunciation so exactly that the texts indicate even the changes at the end of words in sentence-combination, and its alphabet is an unparalleled marvel of phonetic correctness.

This fact, however, becomes most impressed upon us when we study Sanskrit for its own sake; and the intrinsic value of the language needs no argument in its behalf. I wish instead to emphasize the advantage, from a philological standpoint, of even a very slight knowledge of Sanskrit, for it is in such a connection that a foundation in comparative philology is best secured. In the study of Latin and of Greek one must attain proficiency in reading, and an understanding of style and syntax. Likewise, a keen appreciation of the content is due the languages of the two races which have contributed so much to our civilization. Gothic is the third and only other primitive representative of the Indo-European family that is often studied. It is valuable for the light it sheds upon the later Germanic languages. Hence its relation to the other members of the Indo-European family and to the conjectural prehistoric language receives less emphasis.

Turning now to Sanskrit, we find it an excellent basis for a general comparative study. Through this medium can be attained a genuine understanding of Indo-European forms and relationships, and of the nature and working of phonetic laws. Such knowledge should not be reserved for the graduate student alone, nor, as was pointed out a moment ago, is there room for it in the crowded subjects of Latin, Greek, or Gothic, even though the orientation of their word-forms and grammatical systems, as gained through the aid of Sanskrit, is most interesting and helpful.

In passing, it may be well to recall that the books for beginning Sanskrit are admirably arranged for those students who do not wish to become Sanskritists. Whitney's *Grammar* quotes every form in both the Sanskrit and the transliterated alphabet, and Lanman's *Reader* has copious notes and a very clear vocabulary in which cognate forms are given a prominent place. Thus a fair acquaintance with the elements of Sanskrit may be

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gained by private study, and a teacher with such an equipment has obvious opportunity to use it well. Even if one hesitates to attempt learning the Sanskrit or *Devanāgarī* letters, the time will be well spent if all the grammatical and philological knowledge to be obtained through the two pages given in transliteration in the *Reader* is mastered.

By virtue of its transmission to us in a very early state, Sanskrit shows a primitive condition that is exceedingly illuminating. It retains a great fulness of conjugational and declensional forms, and in many other points approaches more closely to Indo-European conditions than do any of its sister-languages. This becomes evident upon an examination of case-endings and case-uses in Sanskrit, as compared with the three other languages mentioned, for instance, or a comparison of verbal endings, or of consonant changes. Therefore it is through Sanskrit that the attention of students is best drawn to conjugational and declensional systems, to formative affixes, and to sound-changes, in such fashion that a real conception of the theoretical Indo-European language is grasped. At this point a tabulation of the Aryan family is fraught with meaning, and the student understands the ancestry, which he already knew partially and vaguely, of the more important modern languages. It is noted that certain prominent modern languages are of other than Indo-European extraction, and this fundamental difference causes the line between Aryan and non-Aryan families to be clearly perceived.

The chief correspondences of the four principal Indo-European languages—Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, and Germanic—and certain equally interesting differences, should be gradually pointed out to the beginner in Sanskrit. Thus he will not only see what is primitive in them, but will also appreciate later developments. He will come to understand individual and independent change and growth, and become able to follow the traces of fusion in form and function. Thus the present condition of each language becomes more intelligible, and light is shed upon their evolution. When considering the modern languages, the student of French will not be satisfied with a return to Latin alone, nor will the Germanic student unconsciously make the similar assumption that Gothic is his Ultima Thule.

The beginner in Sanskrit meets with Grimm's law as a practical reality. He translates but a few words or a few lines for each lesson. Then he comes to understand these words syllable by syllable and letter by letter. He connects them understandingly with their cognates, and sees wherein they correspond, wherein they differ, and how these facts are deduced. He recognizes the workings of phonetic law in every word he meets, as

well as in the set columns of examples which he tried to memorize as a thing apart when he learned the columns of letters that constitute Grimm's law.

The first translation usually attempted is the Nala story, a poetic episode from the great epic, the *Mahābhārata*. It may be of interest to test it, by considering the first line, starting with the *Āsīd rājā nalo nāma*, which is the *arma virumque cano* of the Sanskritist. In connection with *āsīd* may be pointed out the close relationship of the verb "to be," especially in the present tense, through the Indo-European languages, and that it differs from the general systems to such an extent that its conjugation is given separately in the grammars. If the student is already familiar with Greek, the augment may be briefly explained. The personal endings may be recalled, and the apparently anomalous *ā-* in the Sanskrit root permits an allusion to the interesting fact of the fusion in this language of IE. *ǵ*, *ǵh₂*, *ǵh₁*. The next word is already familiar through our borrowed word *raja*. Hence it is doubly interesting to trace back to its original form the Latin *rex*, with our English *regal*, the Gothic *reiks*, borrowed from Celtic and appearing in our own language in *rich*, and bishop-*ric*, through the Anglo-Saxon. This word serves also to illustrate the development of palatals, upon which basis the division into *centum* and *satem* languages is made, and a description of the law may be given.

Thus the details lead in each case to interesting generalizations, for each word that will be considered shows something new, or emphasizes a fact already grasped. And correct generalization is an aim of every student.

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